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THE ROUND TABLE

A GOOD-ENGLISH DRIVE

The English teachers of our school have felt disturbed for a number of years about the inaccurate English of the high-school students. Many vigorous efforts have been made individually to eradicate flagrant errors, and good results have attended these efforts; but still we have the unpleasant experience of holding a conversation with a boy or girl shortly after his or her graduation from high school in which such expressions as "I have saw," "you was," and "I ain't" are so evident that we turn away humiliated. Realizing that the fault is a national one, that as a people Americans butcher the mother-tongue, we know that our efforts must be of larger proportions if we expect to secure lasting results—that we must reach the home and the community as well as the child—that we must develop a desire to speak correctly and a feeling of pride in the most beautiful language in the world. In view of these facts, we conceived, a few months ago, the idea of a Good-English Week.

The preliminary work for this Good-English Drive was done in a senior composition class. The teacher suggested to the pupils on the first day of the term that if nothing else was accomplished the class could, at least, learn to speak more correctly. After explaining the various reasons for the careless speech of the American people and appealing to the patriotism of the class, the teacher secured the hearty support of each student. Each boy and girl began, at once, to investigate his own speech. For every error discovered the good-English substitute was placed on the blackboard of the classroom. Every time an error was corrected by one of the students a check mark was placed after the good-English substitute on the board. At first these corrections were recorded every day, but as the term advanced it was not necessary to check so often. Toward the middle of the term, after each pupil had corrected many mistakes in his speech, it was suggested that there might be errors made by other students in the school which were not included in the mistakes collected. Then the members of the class began to add to the list on the board by observing the errors in the conversation of their classmates in the corridors, on the streets, and at social gatherings. Someone said that many of the young people did not know that they were speaking incorrectly and asked what could be done about it.

Then the teacher suggested that the errors common to the school, with their corrections, might be printed on posters and placed in the various rooms and corridors so that all the young people in the school might have their attention called to mistakes in English. This appealed to the class, especially as they saw at once that if the whole school could be interested it would help each one's individual problem; for a serious difficulty of the members of the class had been that their fellows spoke very poor English and had a tendency to laugh when they heard a mistake corrected.

Posters, which contained from six to eight mistakes, were then made by each pupil in the class. Such headings as "Be an American and speak correct English" were used, for the patriotism of the class had been stirred; they had begun to realize that it was disloyal as well as illiterate to speak so badly. In one column on the posters the errors were written in small type, in another the correct expressions in large type. On each poster there was a different list of errors. A committee from the class then met with the principal of the school to present their plan, show their posters, and secure his support. It was arranged that enough blue prints should be made to supply each room and corridor in the school.

In the meantime the fact had been growing in the minds of the members of the class that not only high-school students, but also mothers, fathers, and friends were handicapped in the use of the English language, and that this movement should in some way reach the home and the city. When the idea of a Good-English Week, with its purpose of stirring the schools, the homes, and the community to a consciousness of their execrable speech and of inspiring them with a love for pure English, was presented to the class, they were very enthusiastic and promised their hearty support in the development and execution of the plan.

At this point a committee from the English faculty was appointed and the larger aspects of the plan given into their hands. The week of March 4, 1918, was chosen for the drive. The patriotic idea of the students appealed to the committee of teachers and it was used as a basis for exciting interest. For several weeks the school paper contained veiled hints of the "New English Drive," which reports said would certainly go "Over the Top." These advertisements were cleverly written and caused much curiosity among the students and the faculty. A few days before the drive was launched, it was presented to the entire faculty of the school and their co-operation secured.

On Monday evening of Good-English Week the members of the class that had worked out the idea placed the blue-print posters in all the

rooms and corridors of the building. On Tuesday morning the school paper came out with a special good-English number, containing clever articles, editorials, and stories to arouse the interest of the students. Every class teacher and roll-room teacher took some of the time that day and the three remaining days to explain the mistakes on the posters and suggest devices for overcoming them. From the first moment of the drive one could not pass through the corridors or enter a classroom without hearing some conversation on the subject or some mistake corrected. Each day there appeared on the blackboards in the roll rooms a slogan for that particular day, such as "Bad English is not English," and "A free country—A powerful language." Under these slogans were written in an attractive way some of the correct English expressions we were attempting to establish in the vocabularies of the students. On the third day of the drive, representative pupils of the school gave talks in the various rooms at roll call on the value of good English and the way to correct errors of speech. Some very useful and at the same time amusing devices were suggested, such as printing one's favorite mistakes on cards and fastening them on a mirror or on the furnace door, filling one's textbooks with slips of paper containing errors, or keeping a thrift-stamp box into which one would put a penny or a nickel every time he made a mistake.

Three auditorium exercises were held at which prominent business men of the city explained to the young people the value of correct and forceful English to the man or woman in business. Business men rather than professional men were chosen, because it was felt that they would have a deeper and more lasting influence on the student. These talks were vigorous and convincing and the students were enthusiastic about them. On the last day of the week the following pledge appeared on the blackboards in all the rooms:

I pledge myself to do all in my power to use and to establish pure, forceful English and to create a love for the most widely used language in the world.

Articles written by one of the members of the English department appeared in our leading newspapers. These articles explained our Good-English Week and expressed the hope that its influence would be felt in the home and community. One of the papers was sufficiently impressed with the worth of our venture to assist us with an excellent editorial, so that we felt we had, at least, started the ball rolling in our city. Many interesting stories have been told us concerning the effect upon parents. Some have entered heartily into the drive from the first, others have resented corrections which their offspring have hurled at

them without the proper preparation in advance, but in almost all cases, when the purpose has been thoroughly understood, we have had the support of the parents and we hope some good has been done. Nor has the influence stopped in our own city. We have had requests from other schools in Indiana and elsewhere for our posters and for the good-English number of our school paper. At least one school has followed our example and has had a very successful Good-English Week.

A short time after Good-English Week a test was given at roll call. This consisted of a rapid dictation, including most of the mistakes printed on the posters. The roll room receiving the highest average was presented with a beautiful picture. Two other tests are to be given at intervals during the term in order that we may know whether the effort made has had a lasting effect. Much enthusiasm is shown by the various roll rooms in the endeavor to obtain the picture.

In order to impress the young people with the fact that correct English is not to be preserved carefully for use during the English recitation, the other departments of the school have been asked to co-operate with the English faculty. If a pupil in history, physics, or shop hands in a paper containing mistakes in English it is sent to his English teacher. The attention of the boy is then called to the fact that he has not put into practice what he has learned in his English class, and both teachers concerned use great effort to correct the bad habit.

Nor have the teachers of English permitted the ground they gained in this united drive to be lost by forgetting to correct mistakes during the rest of the term; they have used all sorts of devices to drive the wedge farther. For instance, one teacher has had each of her students write in his permanent notebook the mistakes he most often makes, with the instruction that he is to place a check mark after a mistake every time he corrects it. Every Monday ten or fifteen minutes are used in comparing notes, in explaining which error has been corrected most, and in telling which has been eliminated. Many students have said that they have overcome the use of such expressions as "I ain't," "he don't," "they wasn't," "between you and I," and "I seen."

While we feel that we have accomplished much, we know that our effort will have no lasting effect until the whole country can be aroused to this menace of poor English. Isn't this a fitting time to make our language pure, to make it represent the highest, the noblest, the most beautiful in our thoughts, to make it American without a hyphen?

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